

A WEST SIDE STORY



DTH/JULIA BARKER

Workers remove debris from West House on Aug. 18, just after its demolition. A group of preservationists fought to keep the quaint house, which was built in 1935 and sat nearby the Hanes Art Center. UNC administrators axed West House to clear space for the Arts Common.

Luxe hotel nears completion

Meets mixed reception with locals

BY ERIC SHEPHERD MARTIN
ASSISTANT CITY EDITOR

Summer is over, and the marble floors, hand-carved ceilings and in-ceiling speakers have all been installed at The Franklin Hotel at 311 W. Franklin St.

But unpainted walls, unfinished bathrooms and the boarded-up rooftop atrium skylight show that Chapel Hill's newest luxury hotel will not open by late summer, as originally planned.

"Structurally it's a lot further along from where it was at the beginning of summer," said Melissa Crane, director of sales and marketing for The Franklin.

Once complete, the five-story hotel will have 67 rooms, each with high-

definition LCD TVs, electronic doorbells, electronic do-not-disturb signs and private terraces that overlook Chapel Hill's downtown district.

The hotel will be the second one in the downtown area, but the only one on West Franklin Street. The Carolina Inn sits at the corner of Cameron Avenue and Pittsboro Street.

Management has made a few changes since last April, when they said the hotel was near completion.

Residents now will be able to choose from a luxurious "pillow menu," and Jacuzzis originally planned for the presidential and executive suite rooms have been replaced by showers featuring six body sprays and three head nozzles.

"These are very popular for wedding nights," Crane said.

Also, the bar found in the first floor lobby now has an official name — Roberts at The Franklin.

The hotel is drawing an array of reactions from Chapel Hill locals.

Ethan Clauset, board chairman of Internationalist Books, located at 405 W. Franklin St., said he's worried that the hotel might eventually raise the property rent for surrounding businesses.

"In the long run, I worry about (my) whole building being torn down," Clauset said.

Will Walter, a UNC junior and



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The large windows in one of the meeting rooms in The Franklin Hotel will offer guests a unique panoramic view of West Franklin Street.

resident of adjacent Kenan Street, expressed similar concerns.

"I don't think it's absolutely necessary to have another high-end hotel like the Carolina Inn," Walter said. "It's an eyesore."

Other shops welcomed their new neighbor more openly.

"I'll be glad to have another strong business on the block, because it brings more business to us," said Andrew Neal, co-owner of Chapel Hill Comics, located across

the street from the hotel.

Jamil Kadoura, owner of Mediterranean Deli and Catering on West Franklin Street, said that he thinks the Franklin Hotel will "complete" Chapel Hill's downtown and that he appreciates that the hotel will not host a restaurant inside.

"Not having food and beverage is obviously to (my) restaurant's advantage," Kadoura said.

The hotel will be hiring for all positions in three weeks, said general manager Michael Donaldson.

Donaldson also said the grand opening will be held sometime in mid-October but not before Oct. 8, the date of the annual Festival event.

"By Sept. 24 to (Oct.) 1, you'll be able to see the building without construction," he said.

The hotel is one of many new projects starting to crop up downtown.

The condominiums at Rosemary Village are nearly sold-out, and a proposal for Shortbread Lofts, also on Rosemary Street, is on the table. A new "green" development has been proposed for the west end of Rosemary Street, near Carrboro.

And Chapel Hill also is in the process of planning multi-use developments for parking lots 2 and 5 on Franklin and Rosemary streets.

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